

[Going Places]

Roaldus Richmond Recorded In Writers' Section Files

DATE: SEP 14 1940 STILL GOING PLACES

"I was born on a farm up in Calais," she said. "You know most of the girls in show business come from small towns and farms. I don't mean I ever made the Big Time but I've been in the racket a long while now. I just got this copy of The Billboard, and somebody's advertsing my name, wants to know where I am. See right there — Babe Parmalee — that's me, that's the name I go by. Everybody in the business calls me Babe Parmalee. I wrote right in and I hope they've got a good spot for me somewhere. I've been up here in the sticks all winter, and I can't stand much more of it, I'll go wacky.

"This is a pretty good town for a small town, but my God, it's dead, after you've been around like I have. What can you do around here? It's a good place to come and die.

"I've done about everything in the show business. Night clubs, cabarets, burlesque, vaudeville — and carnivals too. Lots of the big shots started in a carnival tent, went up to burlesque, and then hit the big Time. Plenty of girls that are stars now were nothing but kootch dancers in road shows when they started.

"That's the way I started myself. My girl-friend and I, we were still in high school and one summer this carnival comes along. We were both kind of wild and crazy, we wanted to get away from home and see the world. We were sick of school and 2 getting hell when we stayed out late at night, and we were sick of the silly boys around town. So we went out with these fellows from the carnival. We thought they were swell, the real McCoy. They dressed snappy and talked big city stuff, and we ate it up. They spent money on us, we weren't used to that, and they told us a couple good-looking girls like us could go places. They made a lot of promises and put a lot of wild ideas in our heads. They did kind of fall

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for us, see? For a while... We were different than the hard-boiled babes they were used to playing round with. We were young then, and innocent kind of innocent — and we were pretty.

“I was a lot slimmer than I am now, I had a real swell shape; and natural blonde hair. Sometimes I'm sorry I dyed it black, but at that time they told me there were too many blondes and a brunette would go over better. I had it red once, too, before I got it dyed black. But I didn't like it red. My eyes were nice, they still are, but that's about all I got left. I had a good voice once, but something happened to it. Probably I smoked and drank too much. Anyway it got too coarse for singing, and it had to be dancing for me.

“But I was telling about the two carnival guys. They had a couple of girls with the show, a couple of kootch dancers, and their girls got burned up because they fooled around with us. They had a big jamboree one night, a hell of a fight, and both girls quit the show and scrambled. So the guys put us in the show. God! but I was scared the first time I went on, and so was Kitty. We were both natural dancers you don't have to do much dancing in a kootch tent anyway but we were scared. 3 Of course there were men and boys who knew us and that made it worse. But we said to hell with them. It was our chance to get a start and we were going to take it, so we went out there and stripped down and shook it for them. The other girls showed us how to shake it good enough to get by. In that kind of a show all they want you to do is strip and squirm around. The way it comes natural for any woman to do. It's not dancing. But we thought we were on our way to Broadway sure.

“We traveled all over the state with that bunch. One day at a fair our fathers showed up with a sheriff, but we ducked out back of the tent and hid in a truck until they went away. We thought it was a great life. All that money to spend on clothes and things; nobody to tell us what to do or when to go to bed, and all kinds of men after us. But the show broke up in the fall, and our two guys took a powder, [beat?] it without a word. And the rats took our last week's pay besides. I guess that was our first real lesson.

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“But we'd been in it long enough so it was in our blood then, and besides we didn't dare to go home. We had some money saved, a lot of clothes, and we still were young and pretty. We had learned plenty about the racket, so we went to Boston. The first job we got there was dancing in a Chinese joint, but we didn't stay long. The Chinks were always making passes, and we weren't ready to drop the color line — then. I've seen times since when color didn't matter a damn — when I was so hungry and sick and tired I'd have gone to bed with a gorilla, I guess. It's not much to give away when you're starving, 4 and I've been that hungry. It's funny how it can mean nothing — or everything.

“Kitty picked up a guy in Boston who said he'd take us to New York and get us a real spot. He knew all the big names and places, and he had a good line. Kitty thought he was going to make us famous, and even marry her, but I wasn't believing things so easy any more. He borrowed money from us and we started for the Big Town. The sonofabitch ditched us in a restaurant in New Haven when we went to the ladies room. When we came out he was gone, and we were almost broke and all our bags and things were in his car. Kitty was broken-hearted about it. I told her we were lucky to get away from that guy with the clothes on our backs.

“We got hold of a couple of college boys, they were nice kids too, and we gave them the old hard luck story. This time it was true. They bought us a couple of suitcases, filled them up with some kind of junk, and took us to a hotel. We stayed three or four days. The boys had money, they liked to drink and wanted a good time, so we had one. But their money, I guess, ran out before time to pay up the hotel bill, so there we were stranded in that room with two empty suitcases, a flock of empty bottles, and no dough. We threw the suitcases out the window into an alley and sneaked out of the hotel. We started hitch-hiking to New York, and we rode into New York in a truck, the first time for both of us.

“It was a pretty tough for a while, I'm telling you. We couldn't get a job, we had no clothes, nothing... There was just one thing for us to do, and we did it. 5 “One of the customers kind of went for me, and he took us both out of that place and got us a job as entertainers in a

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little cabaret. It wasn't much, but it was better than what we'd been doing. It's plenty hard to break into anything good in that town. All the show people who aren't in Hollywood are in New York.

"Kitty finally got into a better night club, and I went with a burlesque company. I lost track of Kitty after that, but a couple of years ago I heard she was hitting the dope and she'd committed suicide. I don't know if it's true or not. She was a good kid, but an awful sucker for any guy with a line. She was always handing money over to some no-good stooge. She was too big-hearted, that kid.

"Well, it was up and down for me. I was doing okay for awhile there, but I got in with a bad bunch. I started smoking marihuana and that queered me. When I came to I was out in the sticks kootch-dancing in another carnival. And the next thing I know I was back home here flat on my fanny. I've been down to New York quite a few times since, and every summer I've traveled with road shows, but I can't seem to hit anything good. I'm not so young any more and I've put on too much weight.

"Show people are good people, the best people, but they live fast and when they start slipping they go to hell quick. They're generous, good-hearted, they'll do anything to help you. They act tough and hard-boiled, but they're soft inside, tender-hearted, sentimental. If I'd been smart I might've gone places; I might've been right up there today instead of wasting 6 away in this hick town. But I didn't use my head, didn't take care of myself. I was having too much fun, that's all I gave a damn about. Lots of the older ones warned me, but I wouldn't listen, I went on raising hell. I thought I'd always be young and slim and strong and pretty. I saw the high life get some of them, but I never thought it'd get me.

"Just the same I wouldn't swap what I've seen and done, the life I've had and people I've known, for the way most of these girls earn a living. Getting broad hips sitting in an office every day.

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"I know this town, what there is to know about it, well enough. Too damned well. I've spent a lot of time here on and off. Everybody knows me, of course, I've got an awful rep around here. Not that I care. So far as I'm concerned these yokels are small-time pikers, all of them. And they can talk about me, call me a whore, but I'm just as good as these girls that pretend they're so nice. These girls with nice office jobs who go to church Sundays and belong to the country club. I'm just as much of a lady as they are.

"There's some pretty good men around here though, and some of the best ones, the real sports, are stonecutters. They're men and they know how to treat a girl. They know how to give a girl a good time — as good as you can get in this neck of the woods. They're not afraid to spend money, and they're not afraid what people are going to say about them. Anything I hate is a goddamn hypocrite, and that's what most of these women are, and the men too. But the stonecutters are all right, 7 they're pretty decent, they know what it means to be a friend.

"I hope to God I hear from The Billboard pretty quick now. I hope to God somebody's got a spot for me. I could still fill a good spot if I got the chance. I'm not through yet. I've got plenty of stuff left. And I could still go places if I got any kind of a break. It gave me a lift to see that name, Babe Parmalee, in The Billboard. Somebody still remembers me, see? And maybe this is it."